

BELMONT CONSERVATION COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES

January 7, 2003

Members Present: M. Flamang, K. Baskin, J. Curro, M. Weil, M. King, R. Foster, J. Smith.  
Associate Members Present: M. Velie, S. Sanders.  
Consultant Present: J. Maguranis.

Additional Attendees: Glenn Clancy (Belmont Office of Community Development). Also see sign-in sheet.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

Minutes

The minutes for the meeting of December 4, 2002, were not yet available for review and approval.

Public Hearing - Rock Meadow Open Space Use and Management Plan

M. Flamang opened the hearing by introducing the Commission members, Associate Members and Commission consultant John Maguranis (Belmont Animal Control Officer). The public was invited to comment on the draft Plan. He noted that a questionnaire was available in the hearing room for those who care to complete it. He will conduct the hearing as follows: For each topic, up to three minutes per person will be allowed for comments. First the Commission members, then associate members and consultant, then the public will be invited to comment. The hearing will then be closed and the Plan considered for adoption at a future meeting.

Barbara Passero noted that she had trouble downloading the plan from the website. No other members of the public indicated a problem.

M. Flamang first described the draft Plan. The objective is to preserve what is there. We have no wildlife inventory, but perhaps that can be done in the future. The Commission doesn't currently have the resources to do such an inventory. Invasive plants are a problem. The Plan attempts to describe a way to approach management of that problem. Stew Sanders brought a copy of a report on meadowlarks that the Commission can incorporate into the Plan.

B. Passero described her plan to have middle school students study the area. Carolyn Bishop noted that the current expenditures aren't sufficient to maintain the meadow. She suggested mowing in late October. She noted that our ideas of recreation and conservation have changed since 1968, when the property was deeded to the town, and the Wetlands Protection Act was not in effect then. She also noted that walking trails on the property do not necessarily disrupt bluebird or amphibian habitats.

One citizen asked what the elimination of invasives would do to the food source of the birds. S. Sanders said that he has done a study showing which species of birds eat which invasives.

Jeanne Mooney noted that the parking is really an accessory use. Scott Johnson said that he has parked on Mill Street without a problem when the parking lot was full, but that has only happened

twice in the last ten years or so. Another two citizens who use the gardens said they have never found the parking lot full.

Someone raised a question about the Met State property. M. Flamang noted that the Met State property isn't taken into account in the draft Plan. K. Baskin pointed out that the Commission has not really considered expanding the parking. One resident said that if the recreational use of Rock Meadow is expanded, the parking will also have to be expanded.

One attendee raised a question about the process of adoption of the plan. M. Flamang replied that a subcommittee formulated the plan, and the Commission is now considering it. We are accepting input from the public at this point and will take it into consideration in the adoption of the final plan. B. Passero stated that it shouldn't be called a plan, rather it should be called a proposal. M. Flamang pointed out that it is a draft plan.

R. Foster noted that, when the property was first deeded to the Town, there was an open space plan. The open space has expanded since then, with the dedication of some privately owned property to conservation.

One citizen asked whether the Commission established the paths that are there now. The Commission did not establish them. David Kleinschmidt from the New England Mountain Bike Association stated that his group has done some trail maintenance at Rock Meadow. However, they were not the ones who spray-painted arrows there. Another place where maintenance is needed is the bridge over Beaver Brook and the one over the creek leading to MDC property. C. Bishop asked whether the NEMBA got permission to do the maintenance. K. Baskin assured her that they did. They've done one or two trail maintenance days each year. They asked to repair the bridge to the MDC property but they had difficulty determining who had jurisdiction there and thus had difficulty getting permission. They have not cut any new trails. They could do some signage. M. Flamang asked that they keep the Commission informed of any maintenance they are doing and requested their input on the draft plan.

S. Sanders noted that there should be emphasis placed on the fact that these meadows are rare and becoming more rare. B. Passero stated that the meadow larks are now gone. She wonders if mowing the meadow at the wrong time of year might have driven them out.

One citizen noted that the recent Boston Globe article regarding Rock Meadow stated that the Commission was considering allowing dirt bikes and motorbikes at Rock Meadow. M. Flamang stated that dirt bikes and motorbikes are prohibited under the draft plan. Probably even bicycles should not be permitted in the north or wetlands area of the property.

Another resident stated that we should be asking three questions with respect to any requested use of Rock Meadow. Is the use compatible with conservation? Are the groups interested in the activity willing to pay the cost or help pay the cost of providing it? Are we limiting the proposed use to Belmont residents? We should consider charging more in fees to non-residents than to residents. She advocates having each group at least bear the cost of their desired use.

K. Baskin noted that the deed transferring Rock Meadow to the Town specifies recreational use, although as C. Bishop pointed out, our views of conservation and recreation have changed over the years. R. Foster stated that we can charge for use of the land and charge non-residents more.

Another attendee suggested imposing large fees for use of motorbikes in violation of the plan. The proposed by-law imposes a \$200 fee for violation. A NEMBA member noted that the wet

spots near the bridges are due to overuse. NEMBA has means to deal with them, and they are willing to do so at their own expense. Another citizen pointed out that we may find it difficult to enforce the rule excluding bicycles from some of the walking paths.

J. Maguranis noted that he only sees one or two bicyclists each time he is at Rock Meadow, and they are polite to him, but enforcement is definitely a problem. M. Flamang pointed out that the proposed by-law is intended to enable enforcement. D. Kleinschmidt noted that the bicyclist users of Rock Meadow are generally local residents. Another resident said that the bikers are not a problem, but the dogs running off-leash definitely are a problem.

Geof Tillotsen says he uses Rock Meadow, but it is not a great place to bike. It is hard on trail maintenance, especially the bikes with the newer knobby tires. Weekends receive a lot of use of all kinds. One walker noted that she and her small children find it difficult to get out of the way of bikers. Harriet Needham stated that a few of the bikers go too fast and she fears being hit by them. She is in favor of restricting biking to certain paths.

Another attendee advocated cross-country skiing at Rock Meadow, but she doesn't see many people using it for that purpose.

M. Flamang stated that the Commission is considering off-leash dog use if there is a constituency that wants to put together a dog park. R. Foster stated that she is in favor because it will help keep dogs from running free in the rest of Rock Meadow and disturbing the wildlife habitat. M. King raised the question of enforcement. How do we make sure some dog owners do not ignore it? J. Smith pointed out that those who want a dog park will help enforce it because they may lose it if they don't comply with the rules. Also, she agreed that it will take pressure off other areas of Rock Meadow that are currently subjected to dogs off leash. J. Curro stated that he is against it. It is not appropriate to divide Rock Meadow into pieces. M. King also asked whether the dog park will result in increased costs, such as a need for additional trash pickup.

M. Flamang is in favor of a dog park. It will reduce the number of dogs running off leash in the wildlife habitat. K. Baskin stated that it is a good thing for dog owners, but not for Rock Meadow. The Recreation Department and the Health Department and Audubon have all asked the Commission to consider it, but we don't have to accept it. Who will ask for a piece of Rock Meadow next? Wetlands move. We have to consider the use of all of Rock Meadow. S. Sanders said that dogs can get us to walk more. Socializing off leash may only take a minute or two, dog to dog. "The Hidden Life of Dogs" is a good source for dog owners. He is opposed to the idea of a dog park at Rock Meadow. M. Velie would like to make sure that all other possibilities are exhausted first. J. Curro pointed out that the Town has no obligation to provide a dog park.

J. Maguranis is in favor of the idea of a dog park. Dogs who socialize off leash are less likely to bark, be aggressive, jump up, etc. However, he does not think Rock Meadow is the appropriate place. He pointed out that a well-managed dog park benefits everyone, so it should not be viewed as a dog-owner versus non-dog-owner issue.

K. Baskin agreed that there are other places in town where a dog park can be put. M. Weil is a dog owner but does not favor a dog park in Rock Meadow.

Lee Barber stated that it is not feasible to have dogs running loose on any sports field in town. It's unsanitary. He thinks there isn't any other suitable spot. He believes that there are about 1,000 families who are interested in a dog park. Mort Speck is in favor. It can only improve the quality of life for walkers, children and wildlife, because dogs would be restricted to a particular

area. Dog owners would put pressure on each other to police the park. He suggests trying it on a trial basis.

Anne Smith asked whether there are places the dog owners could clean up or maintain in exchange for establishment of a dog park. The owners would be willing to do such things if they could have a dog park. R. Foster requested that all who use Rock Meadow clip some bittersweet when they are there.

Juliet Jenkins stated that Rock Meadow should be left in its natural state and the wildlife habitat should be preserved. She is concerned that dog owners are not responsible and does not think they will police themselves. C. Bishop stated that enforcement will remain an issue if a dog park is established. It will cut into the habitat of the birds and amphibians. She pointed out that the proposed location would take up two of the few dry acres. There are other alternatives in Cambridge.

M. Flamang pointed out that the area designated in the draft plan was chosen because it was sturdy and could withstand the additional use. S. Johnson said that he is concerned that it will attract new users and therefore new parkers. People will come from surrounding towns. It will be an eyesore that can be seen from all parts of Rock Meadow. David High also objected to the idea of 1,000 feet of chain link fence instead of pristine meadow. He thinks that dog owners will continue to walk their dogs in the rest of Rock Meadow even if they have a dog park.

Karen Freidberg agreed that Rock Meadow is beautiful and should not have a fence on it. She would like to ski cross-country there. G. Tillotson said that he has a problem with putting a structure on conservation land. He also has a problem with the nitrogen in dogs' urine. His children do not require any resources from the Town other than school, so dogs should not. When he bicycles at Rock Meadow, he does not require any extra space. There are other places for the dogs. He does not want space set aside just for dogs. Joseph Bender agreed, and also said that he would object to the loss of the quiet nature of Rock Meadow.

Another resident agreed with the idea that the dog park would alleviate the problem of dogs running loose in Rock Meadow. Someone mentioned the "Goose Busters" program, and J. Maguranis explained that dog owners can get a permit to run their dogs at the high school field to prevent the geese from settling there and fouling the field.

M. Flamang pointed out that fences can be removed if the plan does not work. Owners will exert pressure on each other to make it work. The gardeners have already had a portion of Rock Meadow parceled off for the gardens. If there is another alternative, the Commission should consider it, but this is all they have right now.

Johanna Douglas stated that the ranger at Fresh Pond told her that the park will soon be restricted so that only Cambridge residents can have their dogs off-leash there. Gale Pryor stated that she believes Belmont should have a space for offleash play so that Belmont dogs can be good neighbors. She is a conservationist, but believes this is the only possible place. She suggested that perhaps an area at the farmhouse or the incinerator could work. She thinks the dog owners will enforce the rules. If the Town charged \$16 instead of \$8 for registration of each dog, the additional fee would provide about \$8,000 to apply against the cost of a dog park.

Another citizen said that the owners will make it work, but they probably need to have a fenced-in area. Adding \$10 to the registration fee would add \$12,000 to the Town's coffers and could be used to cover costs of a dog park and Rock Meadow maintenance.

Richard Yacubian would like to see a dog park elsewhere. Catherine Stalberg stated that the dog park, if established, should be elsewhere in Rock Meadow. Neighbors mow around the swing set and neighborhood kids play there. The proposed plan would interfere with that. Another resident suggested charging for a parking permit rather than the use of the dog park. Enforcement would be easier. The residents of other towns should not be allowed to use any dog park in Belmont. Fresh Pond has already found that to be a problem. How much will it cost to remove the fence if the plan does not work?

June Levy stated that she is in favor of a dog park, but thinks two acres is too much. She wants the Commission to understand that dog owners think of their pets as their children, and will therefore look after them and be responsible for them. Frank Rizzo, a dog owner, said that he runs his dog in the state property next to Rock Meadow. He opposes setting up a fenced area. Another dog owner complained that there is no trash barrel at Rock Meadow. He also runs his dog on the state property.

H. Needham said that she usually walks her dog at Habitat and the McLean property and sees trash in both places. She would like to see an unfenced dog park at Rock Meadow. Two other attendees also spoke in favor of having a dog park at Rock Meadow.

Jennifer Page voiced her opposition. She believes that the Commission should only conserve, and not provide recreation, even though the notion of conservation and has changed since the property was deeded to the Town. She stated that the Commission is irresponsible for even considering the idea of a dog park at Rock Meadow. M. Flamang emphasized that the Commission takes its role very seriously.

Another citizen stated that this is recreation for dog owners, just as much as tennis, swimming, soccer, etc. are for other residents. B. Passero noted that there is already a dog park at Beaver Brook, and she doesn't think a dog park belongs at Rock Meadow. She doesn't believe dog owners will police themselves, and a dog park will just bring more dogs. She presented a form from the Friends of Rock Meadow.

Michael Richardson, who is a gardener at Rock Meadow, stated that a dog park will attract additional people and dogs. It will be a "dog magnet." Someone else pointed out that the gardens could be objected to on many of the same grounds as the dog park.

S. Sanders stated that town, state and federal funds were used to purchase that land. The birds use the gardens as food supply, it is only an acre, and it's already there.

M. Flamang stated that Rock Meadow is not a wilderness, and the Commission has some discretion to consider what to include as recreational uses. At approximately 9:30 PM, he announced that the public hearing was closed, subject to the receipt of written comments from the public which will be accepted until February 5, the date of the next meeting.

### Old Business

There was no old business to discuss.

### New Business - Ogilby Farm

M. Weil would like to have the Commission acknowledge the generous gesture of the Ogilby family to dedicate the Ogilby farm property to agricultural use and prevent its development. The Commission members agreed that a letter should be send to Lydia Ogilby, with a copy to the Belmont Citizen.

#### New Business - Water Chestnut Control

Roger Frymire reported on his three year project to eliminate all water chestnuts in the Alewife Watershed. He has probably pulled out six tons altogether, working alone in his kayak. He is continuing to do this in the Little River in Cambridge. This year, there were only three plants in Belmont. He will continue to survey the situation in Belmont.

He has surveyed Beaver Brook, and brought his test results to distribute to the Commission. The problems in Clematis Brook may be due to the Canada geese at Belmont Country Club or septic systems.

#### Other New Business

G. Clancy distributed a portion of the DEP's recently adopted amendments to Wetlands Protection Regulations. The remaining amendments will be distributed when they are available.

The meeting was then adjourned at 9:55 p.m. The next meeting will be held at the Faculty Dining Room at Chenery Middle School on Tuesday, February 5, 2003.

Prepared by:  
Johanna Smith